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All perfect praise be to Allaah, The Lord of the Worlds. I testify that there is none worthy of worship except Allaah, and that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger, may Allaah exalt his mention as well as that of his family and all his companions.

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Rulings and Virtues of Fasting in Ramadhaan

By Shaykh 'Abdul-'Azeez ibn Baaz

All praise is due to Allaah alone; may He exalt the mention of Prophet Muhammad, his family and all his companions.

This is a short advice to all Muslims related to fasting the month of Ramadhaan, praying during its nights, and the virtue of competing in righteous deeds during it, in addition to some important rulings which might not be known to some people. I ask Allaah to guide all of us to the path of the people of faith, and enable us all to understand the Quran and the Sunnah.

It is narrated that the Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam used to give glad tidings to his companions regarding the arrival of the month of Ramadhaan. He sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam has informed us that in this month the gates of Paradise are opened, the gates of Hell are closed, and the devils are chained. He sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam said, “When the first night of Ramadhaan comes, the doors of Paradise will be opened and the doors of Hell will be closed, and the devils will be chained, and it will be said, 'O you who desires virtue! Come forth and O you who desires evil! Stay behind', and Allaah has people whom He frees from Hell every night (in that month).” (Al-Bukhaari & Muslim).

He sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam also said, “You have been approached by a blessed month, during which Allaah shades you with His mercy, forgives your sins, responds to your supplications and looks at your competition in virtuous deeds and boasts in front of the angels (about them), so show Allaah from yourselves that which is good, because the miserable one is he who is deprived from the mercy of Allaah (in this month).”

The Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam also said, “Whoever fasts (the month of) Ramadhaan out of faith, anticipating the reward of Allaah, then all

his sins prior to that will be forgiven; and whoever prays the Ramadhaan (night prayer) out of faith, anticipating the reward of Allaah, then all his sins prior to that will be forgiven.” (Al-Bukhaari & Muslim).

In a Hadeeth Qudsi, the Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam narrated on behalf of his Lord, “All the deeds of the son of Aadam are multiplied from ten multiples in reward up to seven hundred multiples, except for fasting; it is for Me and I will reward it (accordingly), for he (the fasting person) left his desires, food and drink (purely) for My sake." He sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam also said, “The fasting person has two times when he will rejoice, one at the time he breaks his fast, and one when he meets his Lord. I swear by the One in Whose Hand my soul is, the smell of the mouth of a fasting person is better in the sight of Allaah than the smell of musk."

There are many narrations which encourage and clarify the virtue of fasting the month of Ramadhaan, praying during its nights, and fasting in general.

A believer should take advantage of living long enough to reach Ramadhaan, and he should rush towards obedience, and beware of disobedience; he should exert extra effort in fulfilling the obligations ordained by Allaah, especially the five daily prayers, because they are like the spine of Islaam and are the greatest obligation after the two testimonies of faith (Shahaadatayn). Therefore, every Muslim, male and female, should guard their prayers and perform them at their designated time, with tranquility and humbleness.

One of the most important obligations for men is to perform these obligatory prayers with the congregation where they are proclaimed (i.e., in the mosque), as Allaah says what means, “And be steadfast in prayer; practice regular charity; and bow down your heads with those who bow down (in worship)." (Al-Baqarah: 43). Allaah also says what means, “Guard strictly the (five obligatory) prayers especially the middle prayer (i.e. the best prayer - ‘Asr). And stand before Allaah with obedience." (Al-Baqarah: 238).

In another verse Allaah says what means, “Successful indeed are the believers. Those who offer their prayers with all solemnity and full submissiveness. And those who turn away from Al-Laghw (dirty, false, evil, vain talk, falsehood and all that Allaah has forbidden). And those who pay the Zakaat (i.e. obligatory charity). And those who guard their chastity. Except from their wives or what their right hands possess, for them, they are free from blame; But whoever seeks beyond that, then those are the transgressors; (And) those who are faithfully true to their trusts and to their covenants; And those who strictly guard their prayers. These are indeed the inheritors. Who shall inherit Al-Firdaws (the highest rank in Paradise). They shall dwell therein forever.” (Al-Mu'minoon: 1-11).

The Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said, “The pledge between us (i.e., the believers) and them (i.e., the disbelievers) is (expressed by the performance of) prayer, whosoever abandons it has disbelieved.” (Ahmad).

The next most important obligation after prayer is paying out the obligatory charity (Zakaah). Allaah says what means, “And they were commanded not, but that they should worship Allaah, and worship none but Him Alone, and perform prayer and give Zakaah, and that is the right religion" (Al-Bayyinah: 5) and also, “So establish regular Prayer and give regular Charity (Zakaah); and obey the Messenger; that you may receive mercy." (An-Noor: 56).

It is evident from the Quran as well as the Sunnah that one who does not pay out his obligatory charity will be punished on the Day of Resurrection with his wealth.

The next most important after these two obligations is fasting the month of Ramadhaan, which is one of the five pillars mentioned in the saying of the Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, “Islaam was established on five pillars: the two testimonies (of faith), the establishment of prayer, fasting, obligatory charity and pilgrimage." (Al-Bukhaari & Muslim).

A Muslim should guard his fasting and night prayers against that which Allaah prohibited, whether words or actions, because the objective of fasting is to obey Allaah, glorify His boundaries, struggle against the soul's desires and whims by training one's self to patiently persevere, and refrain from what Allaah prohibited. Refraining from food, drink, and other things which nullify the fast was never the objective behind fasting. That is why the Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam said, “Fasting is a protection, so when one of you fasts, let him not touch his wife (for sexual relations), and let him not badmouth anyone, and if someone fights him or upsets him, let him say, 'I am fasting, I am fasting.'”

The Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam said, “Whoever does not refrain from falsehood in sayings and deeds and acts of ignorance (whilst fasting), Allaah has no need of his abstention from food and drink." (Al-Bukhaari & Muslim).

From these texts, it becomes clear that a fasting person should beware of all things which Allaah has prohibited during his fast and adhere to all that which Allaah has obligated. As a result of this, it is hoped that Allaah would forgive that person, rescue him from Hell and accept his fast.

Things which people may be unaware of

There are some things which people are unaware of or have no knowledge about, such as the following:

1 A Muslim should only fast out of faith, hoping for the reward from Allaah, not to boast or imitate others in his family or town. The things which should drive him to fast should be his belief that Allaah ordained fasting upon him and his hope to be rewarded by Allaah alone; likewise for the night prayer during this month; for this reason the Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam said, “Whoever fasts Ramadhaan out of faith and anticipation for the reward of Allaah, then all sins prior to that will be forgiven; and whoever

prays the Ramadhaan (night prayer) out of faith and anticipation for the reward of Allaah, then all sins prior to that will be forgiven.” (Bukhaari & Muslim).

2 A fasting person may get injured, have a nosebleed, vomit, or accidentally get water into his throat; all these things do not nullify his fast, but intentional vomiting does nullify the fast, as the Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam said, “He who vomits unintentionally does not have to make up his fast, but the one who intentionally vomits must make the day up.”

3 Some fasting people might delay their Ghusl (obligatory bathing) until after dawn. For example, some women may delay their Ghusl after finishing their menstrual period or post-natal bleeding until after dawn if they discover that they have finished bleeding (and are subsequently ready to fast) before dawn. In this case, such a woman must fast and there is no harm in her bathing after dawn, but she may not delay it until after sunrise because she must purify herself and pray the Fajr prayer before sunrise. Likewise, a person who must bathe because he/she had sexual intercourse with their spouse, may delay bathing until after dawn, but must bathe before sunrise in order to pray on time. Men should bathe immediately in order to perform the prayer with the congregation.

4 Blood tests, injections and vaccinations which are not intended to replace food do not nullify one's fast, but if one can delay taking them until night, then this is safer. This is because the Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam said, “Leave (performing) the act which you doubt (its permissibility), for that which does not cause you to doubt (its permissibility).” The Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam also said, “He who abstains from doubtful matters has safeguarded his religion and honor.”

5 A Muslim should have tranquility while praying; many texts prove that tranquility during prayer is one of the conditions of prayer, and that one's prayer is nullified without it. Tranquility is to not rush during prayer, humble oneself to Allaah and pause in each position until each joint and bone returns to its original position. Many people pray Taraaweeh (night prayer) in Ramadhaan without being attentive, and they pray so fast that it resembles the pecking of a rooster. Such a way of performing prayer is unacceptable, and the person who does that has committed a sin.

6 Some people think that they cannot pray less than twenty Rak’ah in

Taraaweeh, and others think that they may not pray more than eleven or thirteen. There are many evidences which show that the matter is flexible, and has no fixed minimum or maximum. The Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam prayed eleven Rak'ah sometimes, and thirteen at others, and less than that on other occasions. When he sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam was asked about the night prayer he said, “(Continue to pray) two Rak’ah prayers, until you fear that dawn might come, then one should pray a single Rak’ah prayer (Witr) to conclude his night prayer with it.” (Bukhaari & Muslim). He sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam did not set a limit for the number during Ramadhaan or other times, and that is why people sometimes prayed twenty three Rak’ah during the time of ‘Umar, may Allaah be pleased with him. Some of the Salaf, may Allaah have mercy upon them, used to pray thirty six and pray three Rak’ah as the odd Witr prayer. Others prayed forty-one, as was mentioned by Ibn Taymiyyah, may Allaah have mercy upon him and other scholars. Ibn Taymiyyah, may Allaah have mercy upon him, stated that the matter is flexible, and that it is best for the one who can prolong his recitation during prayer and prolong his bowing and prostration to pray a lesser number of Rak'ahs, but it is better for the one who recites short chapters and shortens his bowing and prostration to pray more in number.

The one who looks into the Sunnah of the Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam will realize that praying eleven or thirteen is the best way to pray the night prayer during Ramadhaan or any other time. This will coincide with the way the Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam worshipped Allaah, and his way, sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, is the closest to tranquility and humbleness during prayer.

It is best for the one who prays with the Imaam during Ramadhaan, to remain there until the Imaam finishes, because the Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam said, “The one who prays the night prayer with the Imaam (in the congregation) until he finishes will get the reward of praying the night prayer all night long.”

It is recommended for all Muslims to exert extra effort in all types of worship during this month, such as reciting Quran, performing optional prayers,

glorifying Allaah, thanking Allaah, asking forgiveness from Allaah, supplicating to Him, enjoining good and forbidding evil, calling people to Allaah, helping the poor and needy, being dutiful to parents, maintaining ties with kinfolks, being kind to neighbors, visiting the sick and any other acts of virtue.

As in the previous narration, the Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam said, “Allaah looks at your competition in virtuous deeds, and boasts in front of the angels (about them), so show Allaah from yourselves that which is good, because the miserable one is the one who is deprived from the mercy of Allaah.”

The Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam also said, “Whoever performs any good deed in it (i.e. Ramadhaan) will obtain the reward of an obligatory act; and whoever performs an obligatory act of devotion will be rewarded seventy times more (in Ramadhaan) than in any other month.”

It is also reported that the Prophet sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam said: “’Umrah during Ramadhaan, equals performing Hajj (in reward).” In another narration, he sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam said, “…equals performing Hajj with me (in reward)." There are many other narrations which prove the legitimacy of competition in the issues of virtue during this month.